



Razia Sultanova (Editor)

# Sacred Knowledge: Schools or revelation?

Master-Apprentice System of Oral Transmission in  
the music of the Turkic Speaking world



**LAMBERT**  
Academic Publishing

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# Introduction

The book you are holding in your hands is devoted to the methods of oral transmission in musical training amongst the Turkic speaking peoples living in the vast area from Siberia to Turkey. Two forms of musical tradition, with spiritual roots in Shamanism and Sufism, remain pervasive throughout these remarkable and ancient cultures, and are the central focus of this volume. These two fundamental traditions are founded on two historically different modes of life of Turkic people – respectively nomadic cultures that developed in the yurts and tents of the steppe and deserts and the sedentary courts of cities and towns in oases and valleys. Ancient musical practices have continued to the present day through a respect and interest in the traditions of the past, which has manifested both in the practice of apprenticeship and the continued recognition of power of the individual to embody knowledge through not only dutiful practice, but also revelation.

The longevity of traditional aspects of lifestyle is often emphasized by the use of music making, even where a culture has confronted changes such as urbanization and the integration of European models of education. For example longstanding rituals of marriage, religious meditation, healing, and community commentary are often accompanied by traditional music. Music performed in these realms can encourage contemplation of history as well as appropriate behaviour in the present day; it is thus not surprising that performers of such an edifying art have consistently undergone intensive musical apprenticeships. Our aim was to outline examples of different areas' musical cultures in order to illuminate similarities and differences in the course of the training amongst different genres including court, folk, religious music and shamanic ritual music. Therefore, not only institutionalised classical and art music genres, but also some folk genres developed within esoteric healing or worship rituals have received attention in this publication.

All articles in this book are based on examining the development of the master -apprentice (Usto-Shogird ) relationship in different parts of the Turkic speaking world. Origins of musical knowledge are considered from the perspective of both teacher and student. The relationship between the two often accentuates their respective authority. A teacher confers a lineage to the student, and the student reciprocally provides continuity for this lineage. One of the similarities between the learning method of Sufi inspired musics and Shamanic ritual musics, despite the differences in apprenticeship methods, highlights the importance of lineage and the conference of authority from the spiritual teacher. However, the methods of transmission in the Turkic world have not remained static, thus the articles herein attempt to provide not only a historical examination but also corresponding conjectures on the future of master-apprenticeship relationships.

The master-apprentice system of aural transmission today is one of the most intriguing phenomenons of traditional classical and folk music. To study this phenomenon we have chosen examples from different cultures of the Turkic speaking world. The classical traditions of urban culture is based on long years of training and rehearsals, whereas epic traditions of nomads are often understood to be gifts in someway divinely bestowed upon the performer through a revelatory dream, later to be refined through practice and perhaps study with a master. These traditions of learning practice have remained in some form despite modifications in society, government, and available musical sound scapes within the Turkic world.

The issue of “tradition” amongst the Turkic speaking people is complicated by the political influence of nationalising governments, such as the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia, and the USSR. Valentina Suzukei elucidates how the state has affected learning practices amongst Tuvan traditional musicians, with Soviet run universities being both a coveted resource, but also a bureaucracy requiring definitions. Indubitably, changes in education and society indelibly altered the place of the musician throughout the Turkic world, and the addition of European musical forms also twisted asunder the favoured locale of musical training.



Traditional learning methods emphasize first the development of memory, with students learning to imitate the master with as much as accuracy as possible; this imitation of the master includes not only musical tones and lyrics, but also in many instances social and moral deportment. Alexander Knapp's article on Bukharan Jewish cantillation examines the disciplinary techniques of the masters in ensuring an accurate legacy. Fattakh Khaligzade also notes the proverbial "slap in the face" of master Azeri Ashigs that serves to ensure students are reliably hardy purveyors of poetry. Razia Sultanova explores features of a medieval ritual, called "fastening the belt", in the Central Asian traditional school of various professional training, which is continuing in the contemporary Ferghana music tradition traced on the examples of performance of Otin-Oys and world famous singer Munajat Yulchieva.

In keeping with much Muslim Sufi theological perspectives on the use of music and the role of the listener's intentions, which shape the affective qualities of the music, the player's understandings of the historical and theological roots of the music are given by an experienced master, who also aims to bolster the students moral behaviour by setting a good example. Instances of such example setting are discussed by Giovanni De Zorzi's discussion of Ney players in Turkey and the transmission of repertoire and behaviour and by Janos Sipos' article on song learning amongst Turkish Bektashis.

Clearly, the mode of master-student interaction transcends courtly traditions, where one is more likely to find formalized Sufi doctrine, and also exists within the bardic arts of the Ashig/Ashik. These practices tend to combine the revelatory and the pedagogical – with initiating dreams giving further credence to the spiritual potency of the performer, which is nonetheless still refined and extended by learning with a master. Feza Tansug looks at the historical development, in the light of changing government support and audience preference, of Turkish Ashik music. Dorit Klebe explores contemporary ways of teaching and learning to play Turkish *Saz* among the Turkish Diaspora in Germany where it is identified with the issue of national identity. The role of the revelation in emphasizing authenticity is thus a point of consideration.

In Shamanic practices, music coincides with the ritual interaction with a hidden world and esoteric knowledge. Fittingly, the transmission of traditional Shamanic musical knowledge is also, for the most part, concealed. While accounts of revelation are frequent, it has not been common amongst Turkic Shamans to reveal any human source of knowledge, but rather to point to a primordial world of spirits. These ultimately are the true bearers of knowledge and the bearers of true knowledge. Galina Sytchenko provides an account of historical and present day fieldwork amongst Siberian Shamans and the ambiguous nature of learning methods; Saida Elemanova relates the story of a modern day Shaman and her musical relationship to Kazakh nationality, which sprung from an indefinable source.

This book brings together accounts and insights concerning the transmission of traditional musical knowledge in the Turkic speaking world today. Considering the developments in technology germane to the musical field, from written notation to downloading recordings off the internet, the maintenance of master-apprentice relationships is still offering benefits to the practitioners of these longstanding art forms. Although subject to the forces of history, with post-colonial globalization and the inquiry into the meaning of identity a rising zeitgeist, the examples of master-apprenticeship and revelatory learning amongst Turkic peoples provided here, reveal a conjunct, though perhaps increasingly diverse, lineage of tradition.

Razia Sultanova

London, September 2009

**János Sipos (Budapest, Hungary)**

### **Teaching methods of the Turkish Bektashi community in music and music related activities**

This paper examines the way a Bektashi order renders its religious songs. The first part of the paper introduces the community, the historical sources of its repertoire, and the present day learning process from childhood through the *Mürîd-Mürşîd* teaching of the ceremonies. The second part of the paper considers the relationship between the religious and secular repertoires of this mystic Muslim sect.

Mürîd-Mürşîd (master-apprentice) training is generally characterized by a single master, "the owner of the knowledge," who teaches musical information and decorum to one or more apprentices. An example of this can be found in Dhrupad, the oldest surviving Hindustani musical tradition of India. In the words of the Dhrupad master Ustad Bahauddin Dagar, "The master-apprentice relation is the simplest way of learning. As you are next to the master all the time, he forms you first of all. He teaches you how to act, how to sit, how to eat, how to walk, how to see and how not to see. He shows all these indirectly, with his presence and with his attitude. The master only shows the way you have to go along. The master sows the seed of the tradition into the soul of the apprentice, who may go anywhere; he will be a part of the tradition."<sup>79</sup>

Amongst the Bektashi, it is not a single master who superintends the teaching process, though there are still outstanding figures, trustees of musical knowledge, playing a prominent role in the course of the musical transmission. As we will see, this important difference in teaching methods, influences the variants of musical heritage that communities keep and hand down.

Bektashism is a syncretistic folk religion connected to nature; they worship mountains, seasons and heaven. Over centuries this religion was influenced by

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<sup>79</sup> Tóth Szabolcs (2007), "Nem kell hozzányúlnotok - Ustad Bahauddin Dagar zenész" (You do not have to change it - Ustad Bahauddin Dagar musician), In Magyar Narancs Vol: 19, issue 12, Budapest, 03.22.2007)

other religions including Neo-Platonism, Judaism and Christianity.<sup>80</sup> We can consider the Bektashi faith a Turkish form of Shi'ite religion mixed with Sufism. A detailed description of this order would reach far beyond the boundaries of this paper, but persons with an interest may get detailed information in several publications (e.g. Birge 1937).

In 1998-2005 my wife Éva Csáki and I collected more than 1,100 melodies from Turkish people of the Bektashi faith, whose grandparents migrated from Bulgaria (Deli Orman, Ludo Garie, Gerlova, Stana Zagara and Haskovo) to the vicinity of Kırklareli in the western part of Turkey.

Amongst the Bektashi, the learning of religious songs starts at young age. Because children hear the melodies in the house of birth we could even say that they start learning the melodies in the mother's womb. Later many young people take part in the ceremonies, listening to and learning the songs for many hours. Naturally, they may not understand every aspect of the complicated texts with deep symbolic meanings, but without being aware of it, they start to memorize poetry and melodies.

An important, perhaps central phase of this learning process which includes not only music and text, but other aspects of the community life, is when a *mürîd* (pupil) who wants to join a community as a fully qualified member chooses a *mürshid* (master) who will help him to follow the *yol* (path). The *mürshid-mürîd* relation is similar to that of the master-apprentice; the *mürshid* introduces the *mürîd* into the secrets of the Bektashi faith and customs. Though music is not the centre of this education, the interpretation of the sung religious poems is an important part of the tutoring.

Bektashis traverse various levels as they progress along their spiritual path. First level practitioners (those who have not taken initiation into the order, but are nevertheless drawn to it) are called *talip* (desirous). Following *nasip* (initiation) one becomes a *mühip* (one who loves). By the help of a *mürshid*, the *mühip* can become a *dervish* (one who has renounced the world). The next level

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<sup>80</sup> In Anatolia, Christianity was present since the 1st century. The early Christians escaped from persecution into the Ihlara valleys and the caves in Cappadocia where they had built underground cities. There was a large number of Christians in the Seljuk era and from the 13th century, when there was a close connection between Islam and Christianity. Manichaeism also influenced Bektashism.

is that of *baba* (father), one who has crossed the four initiatory gates and is considered to be the head and the spiritual guide of the community.

The climax of this complex musical and non-musical learning process is the ceremony, where the melodies and the texts are presented in their true environment. If somebody wants to enter the ceremony, he has to know several rules and habits: e.g. kissing the feet and hands of the *baba*; touching the ground with his forehead before entering and leaving; and avoiding turning his back to the *baba* while dancing. The ceremony is directed by the elected leader of the community, the accepted, respected, and loved *baba*. He and the musicians of the community, the *zakir*, are important sources of the melodies, guiding the flow of the songs with their instruments and/or singing<sup>81</sup>.

In the first part of the ceremony the members discuss inner matters that are only the business of the community. This acts as a community court, where disputes and problematic issues are resolved. In the second part of the ceremony, the participants eat healthy dishes with lots of vegetables, cheese and fruit, and drink water and *raki* (anise brandy). The *baba* reads and explains edifying texts. These lectures do not always achieve great success, but the community behaves in an orderly way. These sometimes dry and ineffective sermons are only an introduction; they are followed by amusing conversations, exchanges of anecdotes, laughter, and from time to time, singing. The pleasant sensation of being together, the social entertainment and the feasting leads step by step to more spiritual and mystic forms. By the influence of the religious songs, participants gradually become estranged from the troubles of material life and devote themselves to God.

During the eating and drinking the *baba* and the members of the community sing the *the nefes*<sup>82</sup> of the honored founders, saints and poets. These Turkish poems are effective tools of spiritual education; they give advice, explaining the faith, and the rules of coexistence. These verses substitute for sacred texts, and thus the Bektashis call their bağlama lute *telli Kuran* (Koran on strings).

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<sup>81</sup> In some communities there is no instrument, only singing, in others only the *baba* plays the bağlama, and there are also communities with several *zakir*, playing one after another.

<sup>82</sup> *Nefes* is an Arabic word in Turkish; it means "breath, breathing on". There are legends that the mystic poet Yunus Emre breathed inspiration from saints when he wrote his hymns about worshipping God.

Toward the end of the *séance*, men and women dance *semah* together, sing songs, and approach God with saintly enthusiasm and high-soaring spirits. The participants consistently do not consider the *semah* a dance, but prayer.<sup>83</sup>

The texts are poems of Sufi poets, and through folk usage countless variations have been adapted.<sup>84</sup> Though the *nefes*' have authors, there are many variants<sup>85</sup> with similar verses, structures and melodies, ascribed to different poets. People compose similar poems today, and it is not exceptional that somebody wants to send his own poem to eternity by claiming it to be the poem of a famous poet.<sup>86</sup> The poems are written into small notebooks used mainly during the ceremony to refresh their memory. Not everybody has a notebook during the ceremony, and in the different notebooks one can find many different variants of the same poem. This usually does not cause a big problem, because the ceremony leaders easily direct the common singing with their stronger voices and knowledge.

Many texts are transcribed and sung in the dialects of earlier centuries, as the line of Bektashi poets runs from the 13th century to the present. These poems often contain Arabic or Persian words, sometimes misinterpreted and substituted by a corrupted version of the original Arabic/Persian word or by a similar Turkish word.

Though many Sufi poems can be read as love-poems, their transcendent essence is the love toward the saints of the Bektashi faith.<sup>87</sup> The sensual background eases identification with the poem and the learning as well. As an

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<sup>83</sup> Van Bruinessen (1999: 549-553) says that *semah* is totally different from shaman dance.

<sup>84</sup> Poetry plays an important role in the transmission of Bektashi spirituality. Several important Ottoman-era poets were Bektashis, and Yunus Emre, the most acclaimed poet of Turkish language, is generally recognized as a subscriber to the Bektashi order.

<sup>85</sup> Some poems, such as *Ashik Veysel*, have a worldwide reputation in our day too.  
<sup>8</sup> The life of the poets is usually not clear. They often become legendary. Further confusions results from the fact that poets from different places and eras often have the same name, and identical or very similar poems are often signed by different names.

<sup>87</sup> According to theme we can classify the *nefes* as follows: 1. *Düvaz* (the praise of the 12 imam); 2. *Methiye* (the praise of Mohammed, Ali, the 12<sup>th</sup> imam or Hacı Bektash); 3. *Nevruzîye* (the celebration of the first day of the spring, which according to the Bektashis is the birthday of Ali); 4. *Devriye - nefes* on the cycle of the nature, folling a Sufi saying: *insan olmadan evvel göklerdeydim, yerlerdeydim, yel olup estim, su olup aktım* or "before I became human I was part of the heavens, part of the earths; I was blowing as wind, I was flooding as a river"; 6. *Mersiye* (lament on martyrdom of Imam Hussein in Kerbela); 7. *Ağlaş* (lament); 8. *Şathiye* (seemingly funny stories, in reality profound *nefes*').

example I show you a poem of Yunus Emre, in the form we collected in 2002 in Çeşmekolu, Turkey.

<p><i>Men yürürüm yane, yane, Aşk boyadı meni kane. Ne deliyim, ne divane, Al, gör beni, aşk neyledi, Gel, gör beni, beni aşk neyledi Derde giriftar eyledi.</i></p>	<p>I am walking crying-crying Love painted me with blood I am neither fool nor idiot Look what love has done with me Come and see what love did with me Left me in a mess, ruined me.</p>
<p><i>Kah eserim yeller gibi, Kah çağlarım seller gibi. Kah tozarım yollar gibi, Gel, gör beni, beni aşk neyledi Derde giriftar eyledi, Biçareyim baştan ayal.</i></p>	<p>Sometimes I rage as a storm Sometime I flood as wild water Sometime I fly as a dust-cloud Come and see what love did with me Left me in a mess, ruined me. I am a wretched orphan for a long time.</p>
<p><i>Ben Yonuz'um biçareyim Baştan ayağa yarayım Ne deliyim, ne divaneyim Gel gör beni aşk neyledi Derde giriftar eyledi.</i></p>	<p>I am Yunus, miserable All wound from head to foot Neither fool nor idiot Come and see what love did with me Left me in a mess, ruined me.</p>

Bektashis hold that the Qur'an has two levels of meaning: an outer (*zahir*) and an inner (*batin*). They hold the latter to be superior and eternal and this is reflected in their understanding of both the universe and humanity. They use no special books to enlighten the essence of their faith; they transmit their songs as well their religion, by oral tradition.

As Boratav states there are no comprehensive studies on the songs of this Turkish folk religion.<sup>88</sup> Although the names of their religious songs are widely known to those outside the tradition due to their widely practiced performances during *Ayin-i Cem* ceremonies, reports on Alevi-Bektasi music are limited to short

<sup>88</sup> E.I. III: 1094a.

articles, anthologies of verse or music, or brief references in general books on the Alevis and Bektashis or on Turkish music.<sup>89</sup>

The members of the Bektashi community know and sing hundreds of melodies and verses. Similarly to the texts of the poetry, the melodies of the poems also exist in many variations. The majority of these songs are conjunct<sup>90</sup>; they can be reduced to two or four short sections and the melodic line of the sections are convex or descending. This homogeneous style significantly eases the learning of the melodies. There is an intimate connection between the musical material of the folk songs and the *nefes*'; the more developed the folk song, the more parallel can be found to it among the *nefes*'. At the same time, the simplest folk songs have parallels among the semah songs.

In the different publications of the *Gül Deste* book edited by Turgut Koca and Zeki Onardan one finds several *nefes* (religious songs)<sup>91</sup>, but according to our experiences only a few of them are sung by the Bektashis in Thrace. In these books, we found a variant of the melody Salci transcribed, when compared to a similar melody we recorded in the region, shows that Salci's "multipart singing" could have actually been the simultaneous singing of two variants of a melody. This conclusion is reinforced by data from our extensive field-work and from Yaltrık's book *Religious Folk Music from Thrace*. We can definitely state that Bektashis usually sing their songs in a chorus, aiming at producing heterophony, though here and there individual variants may accidentally cause polyphonic

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<sup>89</sup> Articles (Aydın, 1999; Duygulu, 1992), anthologies (Duygulu, 1997; S. Eyüboğlu, 1983; Gölpınarlı, 1992; Nüzhet, 1930; Öztelli, 1973; *Pir Sultan Abdal*, 1976; Taneses, 1997; Uluçay, 1994), passing or brief references in general books on the Alevis (Atalay, 1991; Birdoğan, 1988, 1994; Birge, 1937; Erseven, 1990; Zelyut, 1992, 1993) or on Turkish music (Markoff, 1996; Stokes, 1992; Şahin, n.d.), a study of semahs (Bozkurt, 1995).

<sup>90</sup> That is in the usual melody progression of the sections are in a unison or a second, leaps are very rare; the ambitus of the adjoining sections overlap each other. Similar melodic motions are common in other folk musics as well as Gregorian chant.

<sup>91</sup> The first serious books on the music of Turkish folk religions containing many useful transcriptions, are the 4th and 5th volume of the series *Bektasi nefesleri*. The first researchers recording melodies of the Turkish folk religion in the Thrace were Muzaffer Sarısözen, Halil Bedii Yönetken and Rıza Yetişen from 1930. The first important publication on the music we are examining was the result of the research of Vahit Lütfi Salcı in 1940 in the surroundings of Kırklareli. One of the published melodies is mentioned by Salcı as an example of the multipart singing among Bektashis.



phenomena. For the Bektashis these melodies are not classified as different - individual variants are not considered a different song.



**Fig 1: collective singing in female community**

The collective singing during the ceremony has a unifying effect, and it seems that the stronger the religious practice of a community is, the more uniformly they sing their *nefes*'. At the same time, the fact that the majority of the *nefes*' melodies also exist as folk songs increases the variety.

Let us see now a simple musical theme and its variants. The basic melody has two eleven syllabic tripodic sections with 4+4+3 subdivision. The melodic movements of the sections are typically convex or descending, the highest tone of the tune might be E or G. The ambitus of the second sections is usually A-E, but the melodic movements show more variety: here we can see an undulating motion as well.

The community modifies the structure, rhythm, and tonality of the basic melody according to accepted, but not explicitly formulated principles, resulting in many different variants. Some antecedents of the Aeolian variants with a narrower ambitus combine the Aeolian and Ionian character in their first line.

The learning of musical rules takes place through listening and active reproduction, just as in the case of learning a language. In the case of this melody

group the Bektashi community in question uses the following tools in forming new variants. The scale is most often Aeolian, sporadically Dorian or Phrygian, or a scale with augmented seconds between the 2nd and 3rd degrees (e.g. Hicaz). Meter is 9/8 (2+3+2+2, sometimes 2+2+2+3), 4/4, 2/4, 5/4 (3+2), 5/8 (3+2), 6/8, and in a few cases *parlando*. There are line repetitions in many melodies; the second section is often enlarged, but sometimes shortened. The text may be developed - causing rhythmic division and augmentation and cadence variation is frequent at the end of the second section.

Examinations prove that similarly to the majority of the Bektashi repertoire these melodies above show great similarity to typical Anatolian melodies, and the ways in which variants are formed are used across Anatolia as well.

## Conclusion

This paper briefly illustrates the musical learning process in a Turkish religious community. According to earlier data this process has been taking place in a similar manner for centuries. The practice is not taught by a single man but by the whole community. Music education is only a part of the complete tuition, though an important element, which helps the deep understanding, acceptance and attainment of the essence of the religion and the general rules of coexistence.

The musical texture of the Bektashi poetry is rather homogeneous and in close connection to the folk music of the community which eases the learning of the religious repertoire. Music is the carrier of poetry with lofty ideas and during the *semah*-turning it helps the dancer to approach God. It is never connected to diligent and determined approach to learning. Rather, knowledge is acquired in a pleasant and easy-going atmosphere. The Bektashi community's method shows an exemplary way of maintaining traditional teaching and learning in modern times.

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The articles in this book, written by outstanding scholars, together build a theory, concept and practical model of a significant training system of the oral musical tradition of the Turkic speaking world. The culture under discussion, spreading from south Siberia to the Mediterranean, comprises the art and music of numerous different ethnicities. Much music within this vast area is based on the phenomenon of oral transmission and the distinctive settings of the master-apprentice relationship. Today, at a time of globalisation and the concomitant loss of cultural identity for many countries, research and documentation on performance in oral learning traditions can help to identify key issues of performance phenomena and allow a better understanding of the vast and increasingly important Turkic speaking world to emerge. It was the main subject of the International Workshop and the Conference held in 2006 under the auspices of the School of Oriental and African studies, University of London, initiated and organised by Dr Razia Sultanova during her time there.



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